

About Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao



Elaine L. Chao is the nation's 24th Secretary of Labor, representing a new generation of American leadership. Since her confirmation by the United States Senate on January 29, 2001, she has been dedicated to carrying out the Department of Labor's mission of inspiring and protecting the hardworking people of America. She is respected as an effective and articulate champion of the nation's contemporary workforce, acting quickly to focus the Labor Department on the modern realities of workers' lives.

When President George W. Bush nominated Elaine L. Chao, the first Asian-American woman appointed to a President's cabinet in U.S. history, he described her as an individual with "strong executive talent, compassion, and commitment to helping people build better lives."

Secretary Chao's compassionate nature stems from her own background as an immigrant to this country at the age of eight. Her family's experience transitioning to a new country, supported by one another and the kindness of friends and neighbors, taught her that encouragement is the key to fostering independence, and that Americans are naturally compassionate people. This inspired her to dedicate most of her professional life to ensuring that people have the opportunity to pursue lives of dignity and financial independence.

As Director of the Peace Corps, she was one of the first Americans to personally embrace the people of the former communist bloc into the family of democratic nations, establishing Peace Corps programs in the Baltic nations of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Later, as President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of America, she restored public trust and confidence after the organization was tarnished by mismanagement and financial abuse, thus preserving the nation's largest institution of private charitable giving.

The experience she gained at the United Way helping communities address their local needs prepared her to mobilize the Department of Labor to promote pathways to economic freedom for individuals and families working to achieve the American Dream. She describes her vision for America's workforce as "one in which everyone can participate... where jobs and opportunities are available for those leaving welfare, job training is accessible for those left behind, disability never bars a qualified person from the workplace, and where parents have an easier time balancing the responsibilities of work and home."

Secretary Chao's previous government career includes serving as the Deputy Secretary at the U.S. Department of Transportation, Chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission, and Deputy Maritime Administrator in the U.S. Department of Transportation. She brings a wealth of business experience to the post, having worked as Vice President of Syndications at BankAmerica Capital Markets Group and a banker with Citicorp. Prior to her nomination as Secretary, she expanded her study of policy as a Distinguished Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, a Washington-based public policy research and educational institute. She was selected as a White House Fellow in 1983.

Secretary Chao received her M.B.A. from the Harvard Business School and her undergraduate degree in economics from Mount Holyoke College. She also studied at M.I.T., Dartmouth College, and Columbia University. Active in many volunteer activities, Secretary Chao has received numerous awards for her professional accomplishments and community service. She is the recipient of 20 honorary doctoral degrees from colleges and universities across the country.

Secretary Chao is married to the Majority Whip of the United States Senate, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.